

NEPAL EARTHQUAKES

The powerful earthquakes that struck Nepal in April and May 2015 took thousands of lives and reduced entire communities to rubble.



Nepal is a beautiful country. It is small—about the size of Illinois—but its topography is extraordinarily diverse. Along its border with India to the south are lush, tropical lowlands; to the north—barely 100 miles away—the frozen peaks of the Himalayas form its jagged border with China. The tectonic plates, whose collision more than 40 million years ago created the Himalayan mountain range, have not yet come to rest, and Nepal sits along a set of dangerous fault lines that extend from Afghanistan to Myanmar.

Political fault lines have also created hazards and instability. For 10 years, the country was embroiled in armed conflict, and despite the signing of a peace agreement in 2006, the government has not yet been able to agree on a constitution.

And poverty and inequities have made hazards like earthquakes more disastrous here than they would be in many

parts of the world. According to the UN Development Program's Human Development Index, Nepal is the fifth-poorest nation in Asia. The results: precarious housing, inadequate infrastructure, malnutrition, and deforestation, all of which magnify the human cost of earthquakes in Nepal.

THE QUAKES

On April 25, 2015, a 7.8-magnitude earthquake struck 50 miles northwest of the capital city of Kathmandu; it was followed by more than 100 aftershocks. More than 8,500 people died—many trapped in the buildings that collapsed around them—and hundreds of thousands found themselves suddenly without adequate food, shelter, or medical care. The UN reported that 90 percent of health facilities in four districts were severely damaged, and that up to 90 percent of the houses in two rural districts were destroyed.

// The locals could get timely support during the disaster because of the DMCs [disaster management committees]. Their immediate support saved the lives of many people. //

—Arjun Haharjan, teacher in Kirtipur municipality, where Oxfam has been supporting government earthquake preparedness efforts

Just 17 days later, an earthquake of 7.3 magnitude shook the country again, triggering landslides and causing damaged buildings to collapse entirely.

Displaced people in the Kathmandu Valley gained access to some forms of assistance relatively quickly, but the challenges of transporting aid to rural



areas have been severe. A remote settlement in the mountains can be a two-day walk along a footpath from the nearest town, and hard to reach under good conditions, but since the quake, countless roads and paths have been blocked by landslides and rock falls. Limited power and unreliable phone connections have made it difficult even to communicate with remote villages.

WHAT OXFAM IS DOING

Oxfam's initial goal is to support 400,000 people who have been affected by the earthquake.

The early response of Oxfam and partners has been focused on protecting public health and providing emergency shelter. Our programs in the Kathmandu Valley and in four hard-hit rural districts—Gorkha, Sindhupalchowk, Nuwakot, and Dhading—include providing clean water, installing latrines, and distributing tarps and hygiene materials. We are also distributing sleeping mats, blankets, and solar lamps, based on the needs we've identified in different areas.

Agriculture was disrupted by the earthquakes—farmers lost tools, livestock, stored food, and inputs like seeds—and infrastructure and markets were damaged. These losses could have grave consequences in the coming months, so Oxfam's initial response also includes distribution of food and seeds. In one district, we are providing livestock feed, as well.

While Oxfam will purchase aid locally whenever possible in order to boost the local economy, we have had to dispatch water tanks, tap stands, sanitation equipment, and emergency shelter from our warehouses in Spain and the UK, and we have had to transport some supplies overland from India, as well.

Oxfam's programs going forward will include:

- clean water and sanitation;
- hygiene materials and promotion;
- emergency shelter; and
- support to restore incomes and livelihoods.

OXFAM IN NEPAL

Working closely with local partner organizations and the government, Oxfam has been carrying out development and humanitarian programs in Nepal for more than 25 years. Our work has included helping farmers improve their harvests and providing literacy programs for women. Oxfam has also supported the government's disaster preparedness programs, trained community volunteers in emergency response, and established warehouses for relief supplies. To learn more about Oxfam's response in Nepal go to: oxfamamerica.org/earthquakenepal.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

Find out how investments in reducing the risk of disasters can pay off for communities that are often in harm's way.
oxfamamerica.org/ground-up



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ABOVE: Oxfam volunteer Shekhou Khadka unloads materials for a latrine at a camp for displaced people in Kathmandu, Nepal. *Aubrey Wade / Oxfam*

FRONT: Tika Thapamagar is now living in a camp for displaced people in Nepal after her house collapsed in the earthquake. *Pablo Tosco / Oxfam Intermón*

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